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A tribute to the past : a
resource for the future

Archivist of
Ontario

Archiviste de
l'Ontario

Ministry of
Citizenship
and Culture

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"A Tribute to the Past: A Resource
for the Future"

DIRECTIONS - 1987 - 1992

The mission of the Archives of Ontario is to ensure the identification and preservation of the documentary heritage of the province and to facilitate and encourage public enjoyment and understanding of this heritage.

Since its establishment in 1903, the Archives of Ontario has attempted to fulfil this mandate. In the process, it has gathered, largely by transfer from government agencies or by donation, an extensive multi-media collection of original documentary materials detailing the history of Ontario from early French settlement through to the present. This collection is the foundation for any historical research or writing in the province. As such, its cultural value, now and for generations yet to come, is inestimable. Its monetary value is at least \$150 million. Yet its richness and variety is but little known. It is largely hidden from the public. And little effort has been made to ensure the systematic preservation of Ontario's continuing documentary heritage.

The Archives of Ontario offers a solid base on which to build a dynamic, publicly-oriented cultural institution. Archives tend, by nature, to be in the background of cultural activity: wary that the fragile documents cannot withstand repeated use, attempting to reach the archives' full public through interpreters - those who can spend the time required for archival research and who prepare books, articles, films, TV/radio, documentaries, museum exhibits, historic sites, genealogies or classroom material for a broader audience. New media such as video disc and fibre optics, laser photocopying, micrographics and simplified copying techniques suggest ways of balancing the imperative of conservation with much wider public access to the archives' resources. Indeed, it is time that the Archives assumed its proper role as a colleague and partner with sister institutions preserving other evidence of Ontario's heritage: the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and our historic parks and sites.



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The Archives of Ontario has, in fact, the potential to become the most publicly-oriented, public accessible archives in North America. Given the intrinsic interest of our collections and the display potential of the maps, architectural drawings and photographs; given the fact that the archives covers all aspects of the history of the province; given the fact that we already receive more genealogical inquiries than the federal archives, and given the immediate proximity of over three million people, the potential is intriguing. Even without publicity and with minimal service outside office hours, over 14,000 research visits are made to the Archives each year. What could we achieve through well-publicized exhibits, historical film presentations, inter-active displays, and full reference services in the evenings and on weekends? An innovative approach, combining historical documents and the latest information storage and retrieval technology can be of interest to Ontarians and tourists alike.

Program Components for the Archives

1. Leadership in the Ontario Archival System

A former Dominion Archivist once described the mass of archives as "unlovely things". The bulk of administrative files, whether government or of a business, union, church or association, lack glamour. The accumulated drawings of an architectural firm or the negatives of a photographer are intractable, difficult to manage and often hidden from the public eye. Unlike publicly visible buildings or sites, the fate of archival material is often a private affair and its casual demise goes unnoticed. Yet in research terms, such material is far more eloquent than a random building, site, or artifact.

Public archival awareness has been slow to develop, but it is growing. New archives based on local initiatives are emerging. Over 70% of existing Canadian archives have been established since 1960. A recent survey of archival activity in Ontario elicited 210 detailed institutional responses. Two reports from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (1980 and 1986) provided a strategy for evolving an archival system in Canada. In October 1983, the federal provincial ministers responsible for culture summarized the consensus in the archival community by agreeing:

"that they encourage and facilitate the evolution of an 'archival system' in Canada:

- a) by enabling provincial and territorial archives to take the initiative in forming cooperative archival networks in their jurisdictions, structured as best suits their archival circumstances,
- b) by supporting the work of the networks,
- c) by requesting that the federal government encourage the development of a national archival system by supporting and linking the provincial/territorial archival networks through a national archival information system, making specialized advanced training for staff, coordinating projects and providing funding to the provincial/territorial networks."

Implementing this consensus in Ontario will be a complicated matter, involving:

- . encouraging the establishment of an Ontario Council of Archives as a forum for inter-institutional discussion and cooperative endeavours;

- . providing advisory services to assist developing archives;
- . providing grants for capital projects and special projects similar to those available for museums;
- . developing a conservation strategy for archives, including common access to highly specialized central staff and facilities;
- . establishing agreed upon acquisition mandates for records of local/provincial significance;
- . planning and implementing a computerized data bank on archival holdings in Ontario;
- . Undertaking cooperative microfilm projects for records of common interest, or duplicating our microfilm for deposit locally;
- . encouraging the preservation of archival material of local significance in the region or context in which it was created. This will include returning material already in the Archives of Ontario to appropriate local archives;
- . providing training and educational opportunities for volunteers and paid staff in Ontario's archives;
- . working with the archival system to increase public awareness of archival resources, assisting both in the preservation of documents and in developing broader public use.

2. Documenting Ontario's Past

While the collections of the Archives of Ontario are extensive, even a brief analysis indicates certain gaps. The collection is best in detailing Ontario in the first half of the 19th century and the activities of the government in this century. The extraordinary development of the province in this century, including the economic growth of the north, urbanization, labour organization, immigration, the growth of social and health services, voluntary associations, and cultural contributions are but poorly represented. The role of the archives is to document society, ensuring the collections in the archival system collectively mirror Ontario society in all its complexity. Such a program needs to begin now. In the age of computers, video and audio tape information is erased negligently and with ease.

Our initiatives could include:

- . planning and implementing a systematic acquisition program for the Archives of Ontario in the context of the emerging provincial archival system;
- . launching a ministry-wide campaign: "The Twentieth Century is now historical" focussing on the need to preserve the evidence of this century and emphasizing that the history of Ontario is not just about fur trade, Loyalists and Irish immigrants, but that it continues;
- . launching various acquisition initiatives complementing, broader government priorities:
 - multicultural archives
 - francophone archives
 - northern development
- . developing the capabilities of the archives in preserving special media:
 - audio/video tape
 - film
 - broadcast archives
 - computer records
- . undertaking or funding oral history projects, using this medium to record certain elusive aspects of provincial history and to involve school children in historical documentation.

3. Leadership in Government

One of the key roles for the Archives of Ontario is analyzing and selecting records/information of enduring value from amongst the administrative files of the government and then ensuring that this information reaches the archives in a systematic way. The forthcoming Freedom of Information/Protection of Privacy Legislation reiterates the importance of this archival role for, obviously, if information can be destroyed arbitrarily by officials, the intent of the act is circumvented.

The archives of government are essential to society for continuing administrative needs, for legal purposes and for protecting the rights of citizens. Boundary disputes, native land claims, corporate disputes, eligibility for pension or social benefits, and innumerable other matters have depended on the integrity of the historical record.

The efficient, routine handling and disposition of government files is an essential element in good administrative practice. It liberates high-cost filing equipment and space and facilitates reference to previous policy. The Archives, with its concern for the systematic flow of records, has a strong interest in promoting good records/information management practices. In recent years, space considerations have replaced concerns regarding the integrity of the record in planning records policy. There has in fact been little policy development in this area and records management and information technology seems to be growing further apart.

Archival initiatives might include:

- . drafting a policy on records/information management for consideration by Management Board;
- . providing advisory services and training to assist the records management staff in the ministries;
- . preparing new Archives (preservation of information) legislation, complementing the FOI act and providing a statutory base for the destruction of government records;
- . ensuring that the records of provincial crown corporations are properly maintained;
- . assisting and advising local governments, colleges, universities, hospitals, boards, commissions and provincially funded associations in identifying and preserving their archival records
- . strategically targetting ministries in sequence, becoming active rather than reactive in preserving the records of key government initiatives;
- . working with ministries in documenting, perhaps with oral history, major policy initiatives and helping ministries recover their corporate memory in planning new policies and programs.

4. Public Access

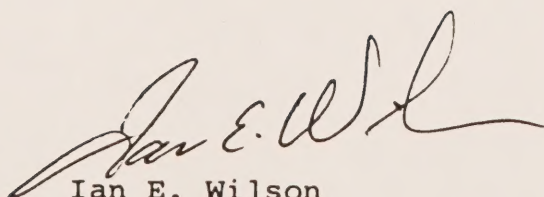
The central element in the vision of the archives outlined above is public access. Archives are the recorded social memory. And like any memory, they must grow and they must be used. The Archives of Ontario has made little attempt to tap the latent public interest in heritage by making its collections conveniently accessible.

Some initiatives might include:

- . establishing an archives in northern Ontario, to preserve records there and to assist research;
- . duplicating our microfilm collection and copying certain rare pamphlets so that the copies can be made available across the province through inter-library loan;
- . duplicating other high-demand collections on microfilm or video-disc to assist research here and across the province;
- . establishing a reading room for our audio/visual, photograph, map, and architectural drawing collections;
- . providing full reference and stack services evenings and weekends for researchers unable to come to the archives during office hours;
- . developing major exhibits for showing in Toronto and for touring around the province;
- . establishing a 1-800 number for reference inquiries, linked to a public service unit;
- . establishing French language services and assistance for researchers using other heritage languages;
- . issuing publications designed to assist researchers at all levels of sophistication in making effective use of archival resources;
- . using computers to establish better descriptive control for our varied collections;
- . using the latest information storage and retrieval technology to assist use of our collections;
- . establishing an advisory committee, issuing a newsletter and press releases to involve

key client groups and the general public in archival planning and programs;

- . using volunteers to supplement archival programs;
- . planning and building a new facility for the Archives of Ontario as a major provincial, cultural institution including:
 - an exhibition space to show our treasures and to showcase archival material from across the provincial system
 - special reference facilities for genealogists, school children and historical researchers
 - suitable facilities for preserving and making accessible the electronic media
 - video-disc introductions to using the different aspects of the archives
 - souvenir shop for sale of archival reproductions
 - film theatre for historical film/lectures
 - tour facilities
 - security controls
 - environmental controls suitable for all media
 - conservation labs for paper and photographs, to provide specialized service to the archival system
 - computer and fibre optics linkages throughout the building tied to provincial networks
 - facilities for the news media and TV Ontario to use the archives



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